

AN EXAMINATION OF THE 360-DEGREE EMPLOYEE APPRAISAL SYSTEM
AND ITS' POTENTIAL USE IN THE DENVER FIRE DEPARTMENT

EXECUTIVE DEVELOPMENT

BY: Terry Neiman
Assistant Chief
Denver Fire Department

An applied research project submitted to the National Fire Academy
as part of the Executive Fire Officer Program

December 2002

Abstract

The problem was that the Denver Fire Department (DFD) did not have an employee appraisal system (EAS) currently in place. The DFD had been dissatisfied with the subjectivity associated with the traditional sole-source supervisor to employee EAS utilized on the department in the past. The purpose of this research project was to examine the benefits, risks, and limitations associated with the use of a 360-degree EAS in the DFD and to assess its' potential acceptance by DFD personnel. This was a descriptive research project. The research questions were:

1. What was 360-degree EAS and how did it differ from the traditional EAS?
2. What were the potential benefits associated with the use of a 360-degree EAS?
3. What were the potential risks associated with the use of a 360-degree EAS?
4. What were the limitations to the use of a 360-degree EAS?
5. How did the DFD personnel feel about participating in a potentially new type of EAS?

The procedures used in this research project began with a literary review of the available relevant information available in the Learning Resource Center at the National Fire Academy, located in Emmitsburg, Maryland and The Denver Public Library, located in Denver, Colorado. This information was gathered, read and analyzed to answer the first four research questions. A survey form was developed to gather the information related to the final research question.

The results of the literary research indicated that the benefits of a 360-degree EAS were worth the risks and the limitations associated with its use on the DFD. The results of the random sampling of the members of the DFD were positive, with 65% of the members surveyed marking yes that they felt the multi-source feedback EAS appeared to be a more fair system, 71% of the members surveyed indicated that they felt that they could give meaningful feedback in a 360-degree EAS, and 49% of the members surveyed were already willing to participate in a 360-degree EAS.

The recommendation, as result this study, indicated that the DFD should proceed with a planning committee and continue to pursue the development of a 360-degree EAS.

Interested organizations were encouraged to continue their own research for more information about 360-degree EAS and its relevance to their specific departments.

Table of Contents

Abstract	1
Table of Contents	3
Introduction	4
Background and Significance	4
Literature Review	6
Procedures	12
Results	15
Discussion	17
Recommendations	19
References	21
Appendix	23

Introduction

The problem is that the Denver Fire Department (DFD) does not have an employee appraisal system (EAS) at this time. The DFD has been dissatisfied with the subjectivity associated with the traditional supervisor rated EAS. The purpose of this research project is to examine the benefits, risks, and limitations, associated with the use of a 360-degree EAS in the DFD, and its' potential acceptance by DFD personnel. This is a descriptive research project. The research questions are:

1. What is a 360-degree EAS and how does it differ from a traditional EAS?
2. What are the potential benefits associated with the use of a 360-degree EAS?
3. What are the potential risks associated with the use of a 360-degree EAS?
4. What are the limitations to the use of a 360-degree EAS?
5. How do DFD personnel feel about potentially participating in a 360-degree type of employee appraisal system?

Background and Significance

The DFD had become dissatisfied with the subjectivity and the out dated dimensions included in the traditional supervisor rated EAS, which had been utilized by the department since 1951. This particular system was revised only once, in 1956, and utilized as the EAS for the DFD until 1994. During this time period the scoring was based on a 100-point system with varying point values that rated dimensions or skills of a particular firefighter for a specific rank. The scoring of this EAS was modified from the original system of mandating a specified cumulative average score for each company, to a more lenient scoring system which did away with company averaging and allowed scores to be determined by the individual company officer. The only modifier to this final scoring change was that any score given to an individual which was less than 70 or greater than 90 was to be accompanied by a very brief letter stating the reason for the very high or very low score. During the majority of this period the scores from these employee evaluations were utilized as a portion, approximately 5%, of the total score for promotional lists on the DFD. In 1994 these EAS ratings were eliminated from consideration in all promotional scores for the DFD.

In 1994 a supervisor rated, forced positive choice, EAS was partially instituted

and used until 1996 on the DFD. During the years 1994 and 1995 this forced positive choice EAS was administered by the individual supervisors to their subordinates, but the scores were never tabulated and presented to anyone. Consequently, the process was never completed and the supervisors and the employees never knew what score was given or received within this system. In 1996 this forced positive choice EAS was completely terminated on the DFD due to lack of confidence and support by the DFD administration at that time. Since 1996 the DFD has not had a job wide EAS in place.

At the present time, the development, and implementation of an effective EAS is the top priority of the new DFD administration according to the DFD 2002 strategic plan (DFD 2001, p.1). With over 870 uniform personnel currently employed with the DFD, it is imperative that an EAS be developed and implemented that will meet the current and future assessment and developmental needs of our individual firefighters as well as the organizational needs of the department. An acceptable EAS will aid in the facilitation of communication between DFD members, while accommodating their divergent interests and values, to foster orderly decision-making and team development within the DFD organization (DFD 2001, p.1).

This study has relevance to the National Fire Academy's Executive Fire Officer Program (EFOP), as it relates to the Executive Development (ED), unit 5, terminal objectives:

Given an understanding of followership and leadership, the students will be able to:

1. Move back and forth effectively between the follower and leader roles.
2. Cultivate the qualities that promote effective followership in their organizations.
3. Provide consistent, effective transformational leadership to design and build a positive culture in their organizations (ED unit 5, p. SM 5-2).

In particular, the discussion of leadership profiles utilizing multi-source feedback for individual and organizational development is directly relevant to this research project (ED unit 5, p. SM 5-63).

This Applied Research Project relates to the United States Fire Administration

operational objective “to appropriately respond in a timely manner to emergent issues” (USFA 2002), by seeking to improve individual, team, and organizational performance through the use of more effective employee appraisal and feedback systems.

Literature Review

The literature review will establish the foundation for this research project by addressing the following four questions. First, what is a 360-degree EAS and how does it differ from the traditional EAS? Second, what are the potential benefits associated with using a 360-degree EAS? Third, what are the potential risks associated with using a 360-degree EAS? And finally, what are the limiting factors associated with using a 360-degree EAS in an organization?

With regard to the first research question, a 360-degree appraisal system is defined by Jackson and Schuler (2000) as evaluations involving multiple raters in the evaluation process, including superiors, subordinates, peers, and the employees themselves. With this approach to employee appraisals, the amount and type of work contact that each source has with the individual being evaluated is the determining factor with regard to who participates in the appraisal process (Jackson and Schuler, pg. 462).

The value of the supervisors’ contribution in the evaluation process is significant, as stated by Jackson & Schuler (2000), many companies assume that the superior knows the subordinates job and performance better than anyone else and so they give all the responsibility for appraisal to this person. However, appraisal by supervisors alone has drawbacks. Besides having only partial information, superiors usually have the power to reward and punish. Thus, subordinates may feel threatened and not really hear any negative feedback they’re given (p. 463).

The use of peer or team-member appraisals is likely to increase in the 21st century in light of corporate America’s focus on employee participation, teamwork and empowerment. Within team-based organizations, peer involvement in performance appraisals is growing. Common performance dimensions with which team members have demonstrated evaluation expertise include:

1. attendance and timeliness
2. interpersonal skills

3. group supportiveness
4. planning and coordination

The use of subordinates in the appraisal process, sometimes called “upward appraisals” by Jackson & Schuler (2000), helps to access information about the supervisor-subordinate interactions such as the supervisor’s participative leadership, creativity, and performance management (p. 465).

Finally, employees assess their own performance by conducting a self-appraisal. “When self-appraisals are compared to the appraisals provided by others, the data often reveals blind spots that need attention” (Jackson & Schuler, 2000, p. 463).

Mark Edwards and his partner, Ann Ewen, coined the term 360-degree feedback in the mid-1980’s. According to Edwards, the use of feedback from multiple sources rather than a single supervisor provides a more balanced measure of performance. “The 360-degree approach reflects a cultural shift in the workplace, a moving away from a paternalistic environment to a more participatory managerial style”, according to Jane Habermusch, manager of human resources Toronto based Consumer Gas Co. (Laver, 1996, p.45).

The traditional EAS places predominant emphasis on top-down feedback and evaluations, supervisor to employee (Waldman & Atwater, 1998, p.5). The traditional EAS differs from the 360-degree EAS, in that in the traditional model an employee is solely evaluated by his or her manager, and in the 360-degree model the employee is assessed on a variety of dimensions by an assortment of individuals with whom the person has contact (Grote, 1996, p.288).

The second research question asks for a determination of the potential benefits to be expected from using the 360-degree EAS within an organization. The following benefits were identified in the research.

First, the primary advantage of note in utilizing the 360-degree EAS is that it avoids the subjectivity issues associated with performance reviews conducted solely by supervisors (Fox & Klein, 1996, p.20). Often, with the supervisor acting as the sole rater in the EAS, the ratee believes that the rater is solely responsible for his or her poor evaluation and any subsequent loss of rewards; the rater may also believe this, this

negative effect can be minimized by relying on the judgments of multiple raters (Jackson & Schuler, 2000, p. 477). It is less likely that 360-degree assessments will be influenced by politics, favoritism and friendship (Laver, 1996, p.45).

Second, it enhances the organizational involvement of those asked to give feedback. The quality movement has been a strong force in promoting the notion that those closest to the work are in the best position to evaluate how well it is being done. Co-workers can often see better than the manager how well a colleague is pulling his or her weight (Grote, 1996, p. 292). Organizations need mechanisms or programs to make high involvement come to life. A formalized 360-degree feedback program is one such mechanism (Waldman & Atwater, 1998, p.5). 360-degree EAS programs encourage employees to believe they can impact their futures and the future of the organization by signaling that the organization values their input (Waldman & Atwater, 1998, p.8).

Third, it provides candid feedback to employees for personal and professional developmental purposes regarding information about their work-related strengths and areas needing further development (Brothern, 1996, p. 47). Numerous academic studies have shown that peers are predisposed to attach more importance to interpersonal skills than are supervisors, who usually emphasize technical skills. Not surprisingly, employees also tend to be more frank and forthright with their peers than with their supervisors, thus lending increased validity to their rankings (Kinni, 1993, p.45).

Fourth, 360-degree EAS provides positive reinforcement for the individual's good performances. Positive feedback can be very reinforcing and motivating coming from peers and subordinates as well as from supervisors; wanting to live up to their expectations in the future (Waldman & Atwater, 1998, p.8-9). 360-degree feedback can have enormous power, perhaps more than any other technique, to bring an individual's shortcomings to his attention and confirm that areas of perceived strengths are actual and recognized strengths (Grote, 1996, p. 292). The result is a clearer, more complete view of performance, allowing employees to see how others see them (Nelson, 2000 p.38).

Fifth, a 360-degree EAS can aid communication between supervisors, peers, and subordinates. In many organizations managers are drawn from a worker pool, and since leadership skills are different from the technical skills of his previous assignment, 360-

degree EAS helps new managers identify these communication soft spots which can then be addressed through practical action plans that flow directly from the people above and below (Flannigan, 1997, p.3).

Sixth, employees at all levels like to know where they stand and how they are doing, one of the best aspects of the 360-degree feedback process is that it encourages the staff to think about the “soft skills” such as their ability to work with others, participate in problem solving and generate new ideas (Laver, 1996, p.45).

Seventh, 360-degree EAS provides employees with a more comprehensive, more democratic and less discriminatory perspective of how to enhance their performance. As a result, companies that use the 360-degree EAS report improvements in workplace behavior by all employees (Bohl, 1996, p.16).

Eight, using 360-degree feedback makes it easier to gather competence data. Companies are then able to hold managers accountable for developing, inspiring and empowering the people who produce the bottom line results (Coates, 1998, p. 68).

And finally, one of the most impressive impacts of 360-degree feedback is in the area of common values and strong culture that the program perpetuates. The survey questions themselves provide desirable performance criteria. They also define and promote an internal code of behavior for the organization’s employees. (“Treats co-workers in a friendly, respectful, considerate, and professional manner.”) The questions reflect what the firm, as a whole, wants the culture to be (Kinni, 1993, p.45). 360-degree feedback is even more effective when used strategically to meet corporate goals, such as developing core competencies and tracking progress in applying skills. Eric Harvey, president of Performance Management Systems in Dallas states that, “the process works best in organizations that understand their mission and vision and have defined values. The folks who are doing it well are the ones that are looking at it in a total systems way” (Brotherton, 1996, p.47).

The third research question that needs to be answered is, what are the potential risks associated with the use of a 360-degree EAS? The following issues were identified in the literature research.

First, “a violation of the confidentiality and anonymity of feedback providers is

identified as a key to the failure of any 360-degree EAS” (Brotherton, 1996, p. 47). If the confidentiality safeguards, or the perception of confidentiality, are violated, the validity of the data from a 360-degree EAS will be highly suspect as a development tool. The most important way to protect confidentiality is to limit the feedback available to the boss of the person being rated. The boss must coach this person in his development, but trust is at the core of using 360-degree EAS for developmental purposes, it determines how much an individual is willing to contribute to the process. Using 360-degree feedback confidentially, for development purposes, builds trust; using it to trigger pay and personnel decisions puts trust at risk (Coates, 1998, p. 67).

Second, the fear of retribution is a primary concern voiced by subordinates about the 360-degree EAS where a manager received a poor rating and the anonymity of the raters was not a high priority with the company (Waldman & Atwater, 1998, p. 12).

Third, managers need to take the feedback to heart and try to improve their styles, even if just slightly, because there will be a heightened set of expectations when feedback is solicited. When subordinates comment about something and no change occurs, the credibility of the process is destroyed (Carey, 1995, p. 56).

Fourth, “defensiveness and denial can present problems, unless the individual being rated acknowledges the feedback as valid, he or she will make little attempt to make any changes as a result” (Waldman & Atwater, 1998, p. 13). Organizations need to recognize that 360-degree feedback systems, and the peer appraisal portion in particular, are always works in progress. They are subject to vulnerabilities, requiring sensitivity to hidden conflicts as much as to tangible results, but they are nevertheless responsive to thoughtful design and purposeful change (Peiperl, 2001, p.147).

Fifth, a lack of clarity over why the 360-degree EAS was introduced into the organization can affect the feedback results negatively. Not knowing exactly what it is meant to achieve can cause poor results. Failure happens when it’s used as a hammer looking for things to pound, rather than a development tool and communications aid (Wells, 1999, p.82).

Sixth, “there is a question about accountability with the 360-degree feedback when it is coming from an anonymous source, especially if the feedback were to be used

for something other than developmental purposes” (Grote, 1996, p.293). Game playing, either “kissing up” or “getting even “ could exist within a 360-degree EAS. But, these dishonest tendencies are much less common when the 360-degree system is used for developmental purposes as opposed to evaluative purposes, which could be used for personnel decisions (Waldman & Atwater, 1998, p.15). “When anonymous feedback from peers and subordinates is improperly used, a department stands to destroy whatever trust and credibility existed between manager and employees” (Carey, 1995, p.56).

Finally, information alone, as provided by the 360-degree EAS, does not change behavior. It takes time to digest feedback and form realistic action plans. If this feedback is not converted into realistic action plans it could take on the appearance of a fad and quickly lose much of its potential value (Waldman & Atwater, 1998, p. 17).

The final research question is, what are the limitations to the use of a 360-degree EAS? The following information identifies limiting factors associated with the implementation of the 360-degree EAS into an organization’s culture.

First, the main limiting factor in the effective use of a 360-degree feedback system, whether for development or performance evaluation purposes, is the support and trust of the employees with the system (Brotherton, 1996, p.47). If participants detect that the system is unlikely to improve their performance or rewards, they are even less likely to actively engage in the evaluative process with their peers (Peiperl, 2001, p.147).

Second, those familiar with 360-degree feedback believe that a third party can insure the integrity of responses and avoid misunderstanding or misuse of the results. Most experts agree that the key person in the process should be a trained staff person from the company’s human resource department rather than a consultant. This person would gather the raw results, consolidate them and then constructively relate the points of consensus to the manager (Carey, 1995, p.56).

Third, in order for the organization to make the transition from training to implementation, it requires the right people, preparation, and execution. Perhaps most of all, it requires commitment and perseverance to the 360-degree EAS by management (Janove, 2002, p. 99).

Fourth, “the primary determinant as to how much change will result from the

delivery of the 360-degree feedback information to the individual is the willingness of the individual to change” (Grote, 1996, p.289). “This process will not make a bad manager a good one. It will only make a good manager a better one” (Carey, 1995, p. 56).

Fifth, proponents of the 360-degree EAS believe that the participants in the process should accustom themselves to the process before the company uses it for evaluation. The time frame for incorporating the 360-degree feedback into a more formal EAS should be perhaps two to three years. Like many organizational change efforts, cultures and habits do not change quickly (Waldman & Atwater, 1998, p.11).

Finally, the costs to implement the process of a 360-degree EAS program may be easier to show on paper, than the benefits that result. The fact that 360-degree EAS effects may take quite some time to realize also inhibits a quick cost benefit assessment (Waldman & Atwater, 1998, p.15).

In summary, we want to be as fair in the evaluation process as we can. Designing an evaluation system that allows for the greatest participation will only help build a stronger, more positive image of ourselves, our colleagues, and our work environment (Clark, 1999, p.13). The use of a 360-degree EAS, while not without issues, is a very promising approach to improving employee and organizational development when management is committed to the process and is clear on its’ inherent risks and limitations.

Procedures

The DFD administration’s 2002 Strategic Plan, specifies a high priority to the development of an effective method of evaluating employees of the DFD, this research project was initiated by this author because of the priority given to this issue by the department leadership (DFD 2001, p.1). This descriptive research project began with a literary review of available published documents in the Learning Resource Center at the National Fire Academy, located in Emmitsburg, Maryland and The Denver Public Library, located in Denver, Colorado. After gathering and reading the information related to the topic of 360-degree EAS, an analysis of the information was conducted to determine what exactly a 360-degree EAS is and what benefits, risks, and limitations

have been identified by the human resource sector and other organizations that have experience with this type of EAS. The information found through this literary search, serves as the objective knowledge basis for this research paper.

The final question to answer through this research project was to determine the potential willingness of the DFD members to participate in a new type of EAS.

Survey Form

A survey form, the results of which are displayed in (Appendix A), was developed to gather information from DFD members about their opinions and perceptions of past EAS and their willingness to participate in a multi-source, 360-degree, EAS in the future. The survey questions to be answered were as follows:

First, what experience have the members had with formal EAS on the DFD? Second, what is their initial opinion of 360-degree feedback or multi-source feedback as a part of an EAS? Third, what is their initial opinion about their ability to give feedback to peers and supervisors within an EAS? And, finally, what is their initial perception about actually participating in a 360-degree feedback system on the DFD?

The survey form also asks for information about the individual's current rank and years of employment with the DFD. These first two questions were included to help further define the demographics within the DFD for this survey. The five numbered questions were asked to help answer the final research question.

Population

The total population of this study is the 862 firefighters of the DFD. A random sampling of DFD members was conducted through the distribution of approximately 400 surveys through the intra-departmental mail system of the DFD and individual distribution of surveys by the author. A representative sample of the total population of the DFD was obtained, as indicated in the Executive Development student manual according to Krejcie, R.V. and Morgan, D. W. (ED, 2002). The chart indicates that a random sample size of 269 is needed for a total population of between 850 and 900 to assure a 95% confidence level for the survey. Two hundred and seventy three surveys were returned to the author, of which 270 surveys had the appropriate information completed to be included in the sample. This ratio of actual respondents, 270, compared

to the total population of the DFD, 862 firefighters, assures a 95% confidence level for the random sample survey utilized in this research project (p. SM 3-40).

Statistical Analysis

Descriptive statistics were used to analyze and interpret the data accumulated from the survey feedback. The information was tabulated and the raw data along with the percentage figures are presented in Appendix A. The survey feedback data was further banded into groups according to the number of years that the member had served on the DFD. This banding was applied to each question in the survey. This data was also converted into percentage figures, to assist in the interpretation and presentation of the data from the Feedback Form. The banded data and percentage figures are presented in Appendix B.

Limitations and Assumptions

The limitations noted with this study are as follows:

1. Feedback from the total population of the DFD was not possible due to the voluntary nature of the participation in the survey process.
2. No attempt was made to acquire proportional rank or seniority representation within this sample.
3. There was no attempt to structure the dimensions that should be evaluated in a 360-degree EAS. That type of information should be included as one of the first areas of development and planning to be participated in by a representative group of interested members of the organization.
4. It is assumed that each of the participants in this survey sample answered all questions honestly.

Definition of terms

member – any DFD Civil Service firefighter assigned to any division of the DFD, other than a member of the current Training Academy Class.

360-degree EAS – any multiple-source EAS that includes feedback from peers, subordinates, supervisors, and self-evaluations.

officer – any promoted rank above Engineer currently serving on the DFD.

firefighter – any rank, Engineer or below currently serving on the DFD.

Results

The determination of exactly what a 360-degree EAS is relative to a single source EAS has been best described as the movement from a top-down approach to EAS to a more participative approach in appraising and developing the employees of today. A 360-degree EAS attempts to address the soft spots that the single source EAS skirts, by encouraging greater participation in the EAS process by members who have contact with the target employee from different work related perspectives.

The benefits which are associated with the 360-degree approach to EAS range from its ability to remove subjectivity from the process, to being able to increase employee involvement and ownership in the process, to the development of clearer more poignant feedback process that aids in promoting clearer communication up and down the organization. Focusing on the soft skills of individual development to help reinforce common values and strengthen the corporate culture is another benefit of using a 360-degree EAS in an organization as identified in the literature review.

The risks associated with utilizing a 360-degree EAS were delineated in the literature review, sighting the violation of confidentiality as the primary risk, followed by fears of retribution from managers, and the dispensing of dishonest feedback and game playing by the participants as significant issues.

Clarity of purpose is sighted as the primary limitation associated with the implementation of the 360-degree EAS into an organization. Using the feedback appropriately, displaying a willingness to change, utilizing a third party to facilitate the process, and understanding that this process is not a quick fix solution without costs, were all given as factors that limit the 360-degree EAS chances for success in a given situation.

The raw data of the survey form, which was distributed to a random sample of members of the DFD, is displayed in Appendix A. This feedback information also includes the corresponding percentage figures relative to the data displayed. Appendix B includes the survey data banded into three groups according to the number of years that the individual has been a member of the DFD. The banded scores also include the percentage figure with regard to each question and banded group.

A total of 270 survey forms were returned, equaling 31% participation of the total

population of the 862 eligible members of the DFD. Two hundred and four firefighters (76%) and 66 officers (24%) participated in the feedback sample. The number of years of service on the DFD by the respondents of the survey ranged from less than one year to over 38 years.

One hundred and seventy six members marked yes, that they believed that a multiple source feedback system appeared to be a fairer EAS than the single-source supervisor method. This number represents 65 % of the total respondents. One hundred ninety three members marked yes, that they could give meaningful feedback to a peer or supervisor in a multiple source EAS. This figure represents 71 % of the total respondents to that question. The final and most significant feedback from the survey indicates that 133 members or 49% of the respondents would want to participate in a multiple source EAS as described in question number three of the survey.

In question number three 80 (67%) of the members with 10 years or less service on the DFD, 56 (73%) of the members with between 11 and 20 years of service, and 40 (55%) of the 77 members with 21 to 38 years of service felt that the multiple source EAS appeared to be a fairer system. In question number four, the largest positive response for any question in the survey, 86 (72%) of the members with 10 years or less of service on the DFD, 60 (78%) of the members with between 11 and 20 years of service, and 47 (64%) of the members with between 21 and 38 years of service, felt that they could give meaningful feedback in a multiple source EAS. And, in the breakdown of question number 5, 68 (57%) of the members with 10 years or less of service with the DFD indicated that they wanted to participate in a multiple source EAS. In the other two groups 40 (52%) of the members with 11 to 20 years of service and 45 (62%) of the members with between 21 to 38 years of service indicated that they did not want to participate in a multiple source EAS.

The key figures in this study come from questions 3, 4, and 5. These questions provide feedback that is directly relevant to the opinions of the members of the DFD towards 360-degree EAS. While question 5 is the most direct question with regard to participation in an actual EAS, questions 3 and 4 give insight to their initial feelings about multiple source feedback and its potential for acceptance on the DFD.

Discussion

The results of this study indicate that there is significant potential for the use of a 360-degree EAS with the DFD. The benefits that a 360-degree EAS can bring to the organization as enumerated in the literary research are significant. And, while there were also significant risks and limitations identified with the use of 360-degree EAS, there are also precautions that can be taken to prevent or lessen the negative situations from arising. The proceeding literary research information coupled with the results of the survey feedback indicates that the potential receptiveness of the DFD membership to this new type of EAS is acceptable at this time and it would be prudent to proceed.

Two of the main reasons that the DFD abandoned their past EAS was because of the subjectivity inherent in the system and the out dated job dimensions that were being rated. “One of the traps for supervisors is autocracy. We get so immersed in telling people what to do, we forget to listen” (Hymes, 1996, p. 112). The primary advantage of a global evaluation is that it avoids the subjectivity issues associated with performance reviews conducted solely by supervisors. Most 360-degree evaluation programs are aimed at improving employee performance, developing employee skills, and improving supervisory skills among managers (Fox and Klein, 1996, p.20). 360- degree EAS collect performance information from a set of colleagues and internal customers who form a circle around the employee. Multiple-source evaluations are perceived as fairer than single-source approaches. The evaluation process produces more valid results because it involves a group of people who interact with the employee in many different ways. For that same reason, the process should be less susceptible to gender and ethnicity biases than are the single-source evaluations (Jackson and Schuler, 2000, p. 466). The evaluation questions should reflect what the organization, as a whole, wants the culture to be. The questions define and promote an internal code of behavior for the organization’s members (Kinni, 1993, p.45). Another goal that the DFD established in order for any EAS to be adopted, is that it should provide effective communication between employees and supervisors (DFD, 2001, p. 1). Again, a 360-degree EAS “can, through the personal nature of the communication in these meetings, break down communication barriers” (Waldman and Atwater, 1998, p. 10). “Performance

evaluations give employees a sense of where they are and how they are doing in relation to their goals. It's important to let employees know they can initiate a feedback session as well. This isn't one-way communication"(Accipiter, Broderick, 2000 p.55).

In summary, 360-degree EAS have demonstrated significant benefits in the three following categories, reducing the subjectivity of the EAS, providing a process that will allow a more up to date rating to take place now and in the future, and insuring clearer and more complete communication between managers and employees.

The main risk factors in utilizing a 360-degree EAS, as identified in the research, are the violation of confidentiality and anonymity of the participants, fear of retribution, dishonest feedback, and lack of clarity of the purpose in the 360-degree feedback process. All four of these concerns can be addressed through "confidentiality safeguards – and the perception of confidentiality – which are essential if you want to get valid data from a 360-degree feedback process. Trust is at the core of using 360-degree feedback. Using 360-degree feedback for developmental purposes, builds trust, using it to trigger pay and personnel decisions puts trust at risk" (Coates, 1998, p. 68). "Failure happens when 360-degree feedback is used as a hammer looking for something to pound, rather than a developmental tool and communication aid" (Wells, 1999, p.82).

The limitations that have been identified are closely related to the risks of using a 360-degree EAS. If these limitations are clearly identified and understood, and there is buy-in to the process from the top of the organization, the chances for successful implementation increase dramatically. One significant modifier in the process is the inclusion of a third party, trained in human resource management, to insure the integrity of responses and avoid misunderstanding or misuse of the results (Carey, 1995, p. 57).

In summary, the author believes that when there is clarity of the purpose for implementing a 360-degree feedback system in an organization and there is proper support for the process by the organizations' top management, a 360-degree EAS can be implemented with a significantly high likelihood of success.

The potential for acceptance of the 360-degree feedback process on the DFD is favorable as indicated by the random sample survey feedback included in this research project. While, only 49% of the membership said yes to being immediately willing to

participate in a multi-source feedback EAS, considering the DFD's past history with EAS, this figure is viewed by the author as being a positive indicator of the members' willingness to try something different in the area of EAS. And, even more positive responses were received from the members regarding questions number 3 and 4. Sixty five percent of the members circled yes on number 3 and 71% marked yes on number 4, which further indicates the members generally agree that this type of feedback system can be fairer and that they are capable of participating in this type of system.

To summarize, with these relatively positive random sample survey results, coupled with the fact that this type of EAS meets many of the specifications identified by the top management of the DFD in the 2002 strategic plan for the department, the author believes that further investigation into the use of a 360-degree feedback system as an EAS for the DFD is warranted.

Recommendations

Based on the positive information gleaned from the literature investigation and analysis, and combined with the relatively positive results of the random sample survey of the members of the DFD, it is the authors' opinion that the 360-degree feedback system should be pursued as the vehicle to deliver the new EAS to the DFD. Seventy one percent of the members believe that they can give meaningful feedback to their peers and supervisors in a multiple-source feedback system without any further knowledge about the process. This indicates to me that the members recognize that they have something of value to contribute to their peers and supervisors in an employee appraisal system.

I would therefore recommend that the leadership of the DFD seek input from all levels of the organization with regard to the future planning and development of the new department EAS. I would further recommend that a trained and experienced human resource person be included in these planning sessions and in the actual implementation of the program on the DFD.

If this type of change were determined to be the course for the DFD with regard to an EAS, I would further recommend that a strong sense of urgency be assigned to the change process and that it be thoroughly supported by the upper management of the department in every way possible.

And, finally, as already noted in the limitations portion of this research paper, the appraisal dimensions of a specific EAS were beyond the scope of this preliminary research project. Organizations interested in the application of a 360-degree EAS to their specific department should be advised to continue their own research efforts to determine its relevance to their particular organization.

References

- Bohl, Don L. (1996 September-October). Minisurvey: 360-degree appraisals yield superior results, survey shows [Electronic version]. *Compensation and benefits Review*, 16. Abstract. Retrieved October 28, 2002, from <http://web2.infotrac.galegroup.com/itw/infomark>.
- Broderick, Eileen Rafferty. (2000, October). After further review [Electronic version]. *Golf world business*, 55. Retrieved October 28, 2002, from <http://web2.infotrac.galegroup.com/itw/infomark>.
- Brotherton, Phaedra. (1996, May). Candid feedback spurs changes in culture [Electronic version]. *HRMagazine*, 47. Retrieved October 28, 2002, from <http://web2.infotrac.galegroup.com/itw/infomark>.
- Carey, Robert. (1995, March). Coming around to 360-degree feedback [Electronic version]. *Sales and marketing management*, 56. Retrieved October 5, 2002, from <http://web1.infotrac.galegroup.com>.
- Clark, Scott. (1999, October). Performance evaluations for firefighters. *The Voice*, 12-13.
- Coates, Dennis E. (1998, September). Don't tie 360 feedback to pay [Electronic version]. *Training*, 68. Retrieved October 28, 2002, from <http://web3.infotrac.galegroup.com/itw/infomark>.
- Denver Fire Department. (2001, Fall). DFD 2002 strategic plan. Denver, CO.
- Jackson, Suzan E., & Schuler, Randall S. (2000). *Managing human resources*. Mason, OH: South-Western College Publishing.
- Waldman, David A., & Atwater, Leanne E. (1998). In *The power of 360 feedback*. Houston, TX: Gulf Publishing Company.
- National Fire Academy. (1998a). Executive development student manual. Emmitsburg, MD.
- Grote, R. C. (1996). *The complete guide to performance Appraisal*. New York, NY: AMACOM.
- Flannigan, Brian. (1997, October). Turnaround from feedback [Electric version]. *HR focus*, 3. Retrieved October 28, 2002, from <http://web2.infotrac.galegroup.com/itw/infomark>.

- Fox, James, & Klein, Charles. (1996, November). The 360-degree evaluation [Electronic version]. *Public management*, 20. Retrieved October 5, 2002, from <http://web1.infotrac.galegroup.com>.
- Hymes, John. (1996, August). The bottom-up performance appraisal. *Fire Chief*, 109-116.
- Janove, Jathan W. (2002, April). Use it or lose it: Training is a waste of time and money if managers don't transfer lessons learned to their daily work lives [Electronic version]. *HRMagazine*, 99. Retrieved October 16, 2002, from <http://web1.infotrac.galegroup.com/itw/infomark>.
- Kinni, Theodore B. (1993, August 2). Judge and be judged: Hampton Pension Services has an antidote for the dreaded performance appraisal [Electronic version]. *Industry week*, 45. Retrieved October 28, 2002, from <http://web2.infotrac.galegroup.com/itw/infomark>.
- Laver, Ross. (1996, August 5). A jury system for jobs: the latest trend in performance appraisal uses feedback from colleagues, bosses and underlings [Electronic version]. *Maclean's*, 45. Retrieved October 28, 2002, from <http://web2.infotrac.galegroup.com/itw/infomark>.
- Nelson, Jerry. (2000, September). 360-degree feedback mirrors performance [Electronic version]. *Credit union executive*, 38. Retrieved October 28, 2002, from <http://web2.infotrac.galegroup.com/ite/infomark>.
- Peiperl, Maury A. (2001, January). Getting 360 feedback right. *Harvard business review*. 142-147.
- Wells, Suzan J. (1999, September). A new road: traveling beyond 360-degree evaluation [Electronic version]. *HRMagazine*, 82. Retrieved October 5, 2002, from [Http://web1.infotrac.galegroup.com](http://web1.infotrac.galegroup.com).

Appendix A

Raw Data (Percentages)

The following survey is being conducted as part of an Applied Research Project for the Executive Fire Officer Program of the National Fire Academy in Emmitsburg, Maryland. Responses to the survey are voluntary. The Academy and I appreciate you taking your time in completing this survey form.

Percentage Figures (%)

Respondent Information: Total Respondents 270 (100)

Rank: Firefighters 204 (76) Officers 66 (24)

Number of years employed by Denver Fire Department: (Ranged from 8 months to over 38 years, 270 separate responses)

1. Have you ever received a formal employee appraisal review on the Denver Fire Department?
Yes 210 (78) No 60 (22)
2. Did your direct supervisor complete this employee appraisal?
Yes 206 (76) No 64 (24)
3. In your opinion, would an employee appraisal system that utilized sources of feedback from peers, subordinates, and self-evaluations, in addition to the feedback from your direct supervisor, appear to be a fairer system to you?
Yes 176 (65) No 94 (35)
4. Do you feel that you could give meaningful feedback to a peer or a supervisor in an employee appraisal system, such as the one described in question #3?
Yes 193 (71) No 77 (29)
5. Would you want to be a participant in the evaluation process of a multiple source employee appraisal system as described in question #3?
Yes 133 (49) No 137 (51)

Appendix B

Banded Data (Percentages)

The following survey is being conducted as part of an Applied Research Project for the Executive Fire Officer Program of the National Fire Academy in Emmitsburg, Maryland. Responses to this survey are voluntary. The Academy and I appreciate you taking your time in completing this survey form.

Percentage figures: (%)

Respondent Information:

Rank: Firefighters: 204 (76) Officers: 66 (24)

Number of years employed by Denver Fire Department: (Banded into 3 defined increments)

1. Have you ever received a formal employee appraisal review on the Denver Fire Department?

	Yes	No
0 to 10 years	70 (58)	50 (42)
11 to 20 years	74 (96)	3 (4)
21 to 38 years	66 (90)	7 (10)

2. Did your direct supervisor complete this employee appraisal?

	Yes	No
0 to 10 years	69 (58)	51 (42)
11 to 20 years	73 (95)	4 (5)
21 to 38 years	64 (88)	9 (12)

3. In your opinion, would an employee appraisal system that utilized sources of feed back from peers, subordinates, and self-evaluations, in addition to the feedback from your direct supervisor, appear to be a fairer system to you?

	Yes	No
0 to 10 years	80 (67)	40 (33)
11 to 20 years	56 (73)	21 (27)
21 to 38 years	40 (55)	33 (45)

4. Do you feel that you could give meaningful feedback to a peer or a supervisor in an employee appraisal system, such as the one described in question #3?

	Yes	No
0 to 10 years	86 (72)	34 (28)
11 to 20 years	60 (78)	17 (22)
21 to 38 years	47 (64)	26 (36)

5. Would you want to be a participant in the evaluation process of a multiple source employee appraisal system as described in question #3?

	Yes	No
0 to 10 years	68 (57)	52 (43)
11 to 20 years	37 (48)	40 (52)
21 to 38 years	28 (38)	45 (62)

6. Would you want to be a participant in the evaluation process of a multiple source employee appraisal system as described in question #3?

	Yes	No
0 to 10 years	68 (57)	52 (43)
11 to 20 years	37 (48)	40 (52)
21 to 38 years	28 (38)	45 (62)